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Numerous Early Season Wildfires Caused by Private Burning

Salt Lake City, Utah – Fire officials are issuing a caution as warmer weather arrives. In March, more than 30 yard, fenceline and debris burns escaped, requiring action by fire fighters. The fires occurred around the state from Washington to Morgan Counties and they were all preventable. Fire management officers recommend that individuals and agencies take some simple precautions before igniting to ensure fewer escaped fires.

- Clear away vegetation to create firebreaks between burn areas and adjacent fields, structures and trees
- Never burn on windy days, check your local weather forecast and plan to wrap up before afternoon winds
- Keep a charged hose and a shovel nearby (if a hose isn't possible, 5-gallon water buckets)
- Never leave the fire unattended
- Notify your local fire department of your intention to burn; some departments may offer to put a fire engine on standby at your burn

Notification of the nearest fire department before burning is required by law in ALL CASES (failure to do so is a Class B misdemeanor). Many of the costly and embarrassing experiences so far this year could have been avoided with a simple phone call. Preparation beforehand can make the difference between success and disaster. In addition to preparations, slow and gradual lighting of an area allows for greater control of a fire's pace.

"People have used fire throughout history and it can be a useful tool," says State Forester, Dick Buehler. He goes on to say, "we're asking people to be more careful when they burn, to take some time to prepare and be as safe as possible."

Open burning is regulated on a state level by state law and rule. Most counties and cities also have ordinances, so, people wishing to burn fields, ditches and waste piles should determine whether it is legal to burn before lighting anything. The closed fire season begins June 1; until that date agricultural fires may be lit without a burn permit as long as notification is made. Yard debris and slash piles are governed by stricter county and city laws, so the public should consult local ordinances.

It may not be widely known, but it is always the responsibility of the person lighting and tending the fire to take the needed precautions and prevent its escape. A permit or notification call does not relieve a person from liability if the fire gets away or damages someone else's property, so good judgment is advised. Fire suppression is expensive.

If the fire gets away – then what?

Despite preparations, fire can still escape. If things begin to get out of hand, regardless of whether the fire is legal or not, it should be PUT OUT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. If it escapes control, do not put yourself or others at risk, call 911 immediately.

Burning is not the only option for getting rid of debris; in fact it is a source of air pollution. Many landfills have sites available for organic material disposal. Cities and counties restrict open burning to October through May; a permit is required in most cases after May 31.

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